

Virginia Veterans News

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Serving Virginia's Veterans Since 1942

Volume 1

From the Commissioner's Desk . . .

Finally, a newsletter . . . not as elaborate as what we hope to bring to you in the future, but a beginning. The objective of the Department of Veterans Services is to work in the best interest of Virginia's veteran population, but we have a long way to go because of state budget cuts over the last fourteen years. Those of you reading this newsletter should think about getting involved by following the activities of the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (JLC). The JLC is working to address issues facing you as a veteran, and it needs your support. Virginia has two primary veterans issues that it must address: the aging veteran population; and the group of new veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan – we need to make ourselves available to meet both groups' needs. Our most important goal is to strengthen our benefits delivery program by improving our staffing and reviewing office locations and itinerant service points. Serving Virginia's veterans is good business because first, you help those who served our country in uniform; and, second, veterans are a tremendous boost to the state's economy. Most Virginians don't realize that Virginia veterans create a large cash flow into the Commonwealth. The U.S Department of Veterans Affairs pays annually over \$1.6 billion in the form of disability, education and insurance benefits to Virginia veterans and wages to USDVA employees. The Department of Defense also pays military retirees over \$3 billion annually. Veterans truly are Virginia's best resource.

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DVS Adopts Mission Statement

DVS recently adopted a new mission statement that better encompasses its philosophy and objectives in providing quality service to Virginia's veterans: *To serve Virginia's veterans and their dependents by ensuring they receive the benefits, support, quality care and recognition they have earned through their service and sacrifice.*

New Sitter-Barfoot Care Center

Construction on the new Sitter-Barfoot Care Center in Richmond is scheduled to begin in early 2005. It is anticipated construction will be complete in the Fall of 2006. The center is named in honor of Korean War Medal of Honor recipient Colonel Carl Sitter, USMC, and World War II Medal of Honor recipient Col Van Barfoot, USA, both of whom have ties to the Richmond area. Some of the center's features will include:

- ★ 200 private rooms
- ★ Two nursing wings with 120 beds
- ★ One Alzheimer's wing with 40 beds, courtyard and wander garden
- ★ One assisted living wing with 40 beds
- ★ Physical and Occupational Therapy units
- ★ Chapel
- ★ Resident kitchen facilities

VVCC Renovation Project

The Virginia Veterans Care Center in Roanoke soon will get a much-needed facelift. The renovation provides for improvements to safety, electrical and telephone systems; new carpet, wallpaper and paint; replacement of patient beds; and renovation of nursing stations. This

project will be funded 65% by the USDVA, and 35% by the Commonwealth. Some of the improvements already have taken place, with the most of the items expected to be completed by December 2005.

VVCC Recognized

The Virginia Veterans Care Center in Roanoke recently received a Certificate of Achievement from the Center for Quality Health Care Services and Consumer Protection for full compliance with the federal certification requirements for nursing facilities participating in the Medicare and/or Medicaid programs. This recognition was a result of an inspection of the facility with zero deficiencies.

VVCC Activities

Through a donation from American Legion Post 184 in Herndon, VVCC residents soon will enjoy music from a portable, electric piano, known as a "clavinova;" and thanks to a donation from the Disabled American Veterans York County Chapter 13, two aviaries have been placed in the center.

The staff at the VVCC have been busy planning the 2004 *Operation Holiday Spirit (OHS)*. OHS is an annual holiday gift program for the Center's 240 veterans. The program is made possible through donations from veterans service and community organizations and other friends and supporters of the VVCC. With the support of these caring benefactors, every veteran will receive personalized gifts of their choice. In many cases, these gifts are the only ones they will receive. The gifts are delivered to every room on Christmas Eve morning by Santa and Mrs. Claus!

DVS Welcomes New Cemetery Administrator

Dan Kemano joined DVS in August as the new administrator of Virginia's veterans cemeteries and on-site manager of the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery. Dan is a retired Navy Command Master Chief, with a wealth of knowledge and experience in cemetery operations.

New Entrance Sign at Amelia Cemetery

DVS will apply for a USDVA grant to construct a new entrance sign for the Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Amelia. If the funding is received, it is hoped that the sign will be in place by mid-2005.

Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery Opens

On November 1, DVS welcomed Governor Warner; Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, Brigadier General John W. Nichols, U. S. Army, Ret.; U. S. and state legislators; and others for the dedication ceremony of the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery in Suffolk. Phase I of the Cemetery will utilize 26 of the 73 acres, will have over 8,799 burial plots, 1,260 plots for in-ground interment of cremated remains, and 1,920 columbarium resting places. Phases II and III will provide significant capacity for future burials.

Veterans Cemeteries Prepare for Winter Months

In advance of the winter months, garden sections are being leveled and new gravesites have been covered with sod at Virginia's Veterans cemeteries. Mulch will be spread around all plants and shrubs to protect the roots, and trees will be trimmed. Exterior wood trim on all buildings will be painted to protect against harsh winter conditions.

Virginia Veterans Claims

For the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2005, DVS reported:

- ★ 1,772 decisions received
- ★ 1,277 claims granted, a 72.06% grant rate
- ★ \$4,196,836 in retroactive claims for 228 veterans
- ★ 11 large awards of over \$50,000

VA Expands Benefits for Ex-POWs

Continuing the commitment to former prisoners of war, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Anthony J. Principi, recently announced that the Bush Administration will expand benefits to all former POWs with strokes and common heart diseases. This group of veterans will automatically be eligible for disability compensation for those common ailments, and their spouses and dependents will be eligible for service-connected survivors' benefits if these diseases contribute to the death of a former POW. The new law became effective October 7, 2004. Former POWs should contact their local veterans service officers to determine how this

change could affect them. Those POWs who have applied for a service connection to various forms of heart disease and been denied, should consider reopening their claims.

Depleted Uranium Study

A new study finds the health risk from inhaling airborne particles of depleted uranium are very low. The Capstone Study found that even soldiers in armored vehicles hit by depleted-uranium munitions would still not suffer health risks from inhaling the particles. Of course, officials said, soldiers would certainly have other problems if their tank or armored personnel carrier was hit by a depleted-uranium round. DVS Commissioner Jon Mangis is pleased with the results of the study, but reminds veterans that after the Vietnam war, several government studies concluded that Agent Orange was not harmful, but today, those conclusions have been called into question.

Veterans Education Approval Service

The offices of the Veterans Education Approval Service relocated to the Pocahontas Building at 900 East Main Street in Richmond in late October. The Veterans Education Approval Services, or State Approving Agency as it formerly was known, reviews and approves educational courses and programs pursued by veterans offered at qualified educational institutions and/or training establishments located in Virginia.

Joint Leadership Council

The Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (JLC) adopted its 2005 Legislative Agenda at its September 7, 2004, meeting. The JLC also elected Connie O'Neill as its Chairman, and Frank Wickersham as its Vice-Chairman, for the coming year. In addition, the JLC appointed ad hoc committees to review the current Constitution and Bylaws, and develop Mission and Vision Statements, for recommendations to the full Council at its December 7, 2004, meeting.

Board of Veterans Services

At its September 27, 2004, meeting, the Board of Veterans Services discussed the shortage of benefits service officers statewide. The Board voted to support additional veterans service officers as its number one priority throughout the state budget process.

Veterans Services Foundation

At its September 30, 2004, meeting the Veterans Services Foundation Trustees authorized the Commissioner of Veterans Services, after consultation with the VSF Chair, to approve expenditures for which specific donations have been made, up to \$10,000. The Trustees also adopted Bylaws, which will help facilitate disbursements from the Veterans Services Fund.